## Final project for the theme:

## **“British national character vs. Russian national character: stereotypes**”

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# **INTRODUCTION**

National character describes the character of people of nation in general, it doesn't describe the character of every person. Every person has its own character, but according to the person's belonging to some nation many traits of character are similar and these features may be explained as the national character.

The first part of the project includes description of British nationalities, their national identities, influences of immigrants on the British culture. Such British national characteristics as traditionalism, individualism, conservatism, coldness, sense of humor are the common British national characteristics which are explained from the point of cultural origin. Education, food/drink habits also have stereotypes some of which are mistaken.

The second part of the project is about Russian national character and their stereotypes. Various nationalities living in Russia (more than 185 nationalities) influence on our culture but in this project I’m going to speak about Russians, their lives, habits, traits of character. Conservatism, caution, pessimism, sensitiveness, patience, stubbornness, sense of humor are the typical Russian national characteristics. Demographics come into play in the education and in the gender inequality. Richness of Russian language and Russian cuisine are another important national properties.

In the third part of the work despite all the differences I’ve found out the similarities between British and Russian national characters.

1. **British national character: stereotypes**

The British, like the people of every country, tend to be attributed with certain characteristics which are supposedly typical. Many things which are often regarded as typically British derive from books, songs or plays which were written a long time ago and which are no longer representative of modern life.

## **1.1 British nationalities**

The stereotype is “All British people are English”

Great Britain is the name of an Island containing three countries. The inhabitants of these countries are very different.

Although everyone in the UK has a British citizenship they have different nationalities. [England](http://projectbritain.com/britain/england_facts.htm) is only one of the three countries in [Britain](http://projectbritain.com/britain/britain.htm) ([Scotland](http://projectbritain.com/britain/scotland.htm), England and [Wales](http://projectbritain.com/britain/wales.htm)). The Scots and the Welsh sometimes get angry when they are referred to as 'English'. They do not live in England and they have their own parliaments, so why should they take their identity from England? They have their own identity.

There are often distinct differences between people living in each of the three countries in Britain. This is because different groups of people tend to develop their own customs and way of life.

National identity and citizenship are not always the same thing in Great Britain or the UK. Most white people born in Great Britain, although British citizens, do not regard themselves as British and prefer to state their national identity as English, Scottish or Welsh.

People born in England are called English or British and can say that they live in England, Britain and/or the UK. Most people in England tend to say they are British rather than English.



People born in Scotland are called Scottish or British and can say that they live in Scotland, Britain and/or the UK.   
Most people in Scotland will say they are Scottish rather than British.

People born in Wales are called Welsh or British and can say that they live in Wales, Britain and/or the UK. Most people in Wales will say they are Welsh rather than British.

Besides, there are a lot of non-native British living in Britain. Most non-native British, although themselves born in Britain, have parents who were born outside it. The great wave of immigration from the Caribbean and south Asia took place between 1950 and 1965. These immigrants, especially those from south Asia, brought with them different languages, different religions (Hindu and Muslim) and everyday habits and attitudes that were sometimes radically different from traditional British ones.

## **1.2 Culture and character**

**Traditionalism**

One example of British national stereotypes is the popular belief that Britain is a “land of tradition”. The annual ceremony of the state opening of Parliament, for instance, carefully follows customs which are centuries old.



However, in their private everyday lives, the British as individuals are probably less inclined to follow tradition than are the people of most other countries. There are very few ancient customs that are followed by the majority of families on special occasions. The country has fewer local parades or processions with genuine folk roots than most other countries have. The English language has fewer sayings or proverbs that are in common everyday use than many other languages do.

There are many examples of supposedly typical British habits which are simply not typical any more. For example, the stereotyped image of the London 'city gent' includes the wearing of a bowler hat. In fact, this type of hat has not been commonly worn for a long time. Food and drink provide other examples. The traditional 'British' (or 'English') breakfast is a large 'fry-up’ preceded by cereal with milk and followed by toast, butter and marmalade, all washed down with lots of tea. In fact, only about 10% of the people in Britain actually have this sort of breakfast.

Even when a British habit conforms to the stereotype, the wrong conclusions can sometimes be drawn from it. The supposed British love of queuing is an example. Yes, British people do formal queues whenever they are waiting for something, but this does not mean that they enjoy it. Apparently, the British hate having to wait and have less patience than people in many other countries.

**Conservatism and Individualism**

The British can be conservative about anything which is perceived as a token of Britishness. In these matters, their conservatism can combine with their individualism; they are rather proud of being different. It is for example, very difficult to imagine that they will ever agree to change from driving on the left -hand side of the road to driving on the right.

Systems of measurement are another example.

British manufacturers are obliged to give the weight of their tins and packets in kilos and grams. But everybody in Britain still shops in pounds and ounces. The weather forecasters on the television use the Celsius scale of temperature. But nearly everybody still thinks in Fahrenheit.

**Coldness and rudeness**

Sometimes people from other countries consider British to be coldness.

The key is this: being friendly in Britain often involves showing that you are not bothering with the formalities. This means not addressing someone by his or her title (Mr, Mrs, Professor etc.), not dressing smartly when entertaining guests, not shaking hands when meeting and not saying 'please' when making a request. When they avoid doing these things with you, the British are not being unfriendly or disrespectful, they are implying that you are in the category 'friend', and so all the rules can be ignored. To address someone by his or her title or to say 'please' is to observe formalities and therefore to put a distance between the people involved.

It is probably true that the British, especially the English, are more reserved than the people of many other countries. They find it comparatively difficult to indicate friendship by open displays of affection. For example, it is not the convention to kiss when meeting a friend. Instead, friendship is symbolized by behaving as casually as possible. If you are in a British person's house, and you are told to 'help yourself' to something, your host is not being rude or suggesting that you are of no importance - he or she is showing that you are completely accepted and just like 'one of the family'.

**Sense of humor**

There also stereotypes of British humor. Some people consider that the British don’t have sense of humor. But this is not true in fact. The English humor is a way of life. From my point of view, a distinctive feature of typical English jokes is a coldness under improbable circumstances. Before understanding English humor, it is necessary to learn more about British, about their culture and habits. British laugh at everything that can raise a smile: over, weather, the government, even royal family.

Here is an extract from a book by Kate Fox entitled “Watching the English”, and subtitled “The Hidden Rules of English Behavior”, published by Hodder.

“The English do not have any sort of global monopoly on humor, but what is distinctive is the sheer pervasiveness and supreme importance of humor in English everyday life and culture. In other cultures, there is “a time and a place” for humor: among the English it is a constant, a given – there is always an undercurrent of humor. Virtually all English conversations and social interactions involve at least some degree of banter, teasing, irony, wit, mockery, wordplay, satire, understatement, humorous self-depreciation, sarcasm, pomposity-pricking or just silliness…. Humor is like breathing, we cannot function without it. … when in doubt, joke.”

Black humor is also very popular:

- “Mummy, Mummy. Why do I keep on running round in circles?”

- “Shut up, or I’ll nail your other foot to the floor!”

## **1.3 Education**

Another stereotype is related to intelligence, education and “high culture” in Britain. Teachers and academic staff, although respected, do not have as high a status as they do in most other countries. Nobody normally proclaims their academic qualifications or title to the world at large.

There are large sections of both the upper and working class in Britain who, traditionally at least, have not encouraged their children to go to university. It is still unusual for parents to arrange extra private tuition for their children, even among those who can easily afford it.

The word 'clever' often has negative connotations. It suggests someone who uses trickery, a person who cannot quite be trusted (as in the expression ' too clever by half ').

Evidence of this attitude can be found in all four nations of the British Isles. However, it is probably better seen as a specifically English characteristic and not a British one. For instance, the Scottish have always placed a high value on education for all classes.

## **1.4 Language**

The stereotype is “Everyone has a “British accent”.

There is no such thing as a British Accent but there are accents and dialects. People from the South sound completely different from people from the North.

The English pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar which is used in public speaking, radio and television news broadcasts, books and newspapers is known as “standard British English”. Such a language is considered to be a prestigious and is the indication of the person’s class.

The most prestigious accent in Britain is known as 'Received Pronunciation' (RP). It is the combination of standard English spoken with an RP accent that is usually meant when people talk about 'BBC English' or 'Oxford English' or 'the Queen's English'. In England and Wales, anyone who speaks with a strong regional accent is automatically assumed to be working class. Conversely, anyone with an RP accent is assumed to be upper or upper-middle class. (In Scotland and Northern Ireland, the situation is slightly different; in these places, some forms of regional accent are almost as prestigious as RP).

## **1.5 Food and drink**

In Britain you can find traditional food like roast beef or fish and chips — and vegetarian food for those who do not eat meat. As well as foods from different parts of Britain, you can buy Italian, Mexican and West Indian food.  In Britain’s pubs you can drink beers and wines from many different countries as well as cider from the West Country and whisky from Scotland.

The traditional “British” (or “English”) breakfast is a large “fry-up” preceded by cereal with milk and followed by toast, butter and marmalade, all washed down with lots of tea. In fact, only about 10% of the people in Britain actually have this sort of breakfast. The image of the British as a nation of tea -drinkers is another stereotype which is somewhat out of date. It is true that it is still prepared in a distinctive way (strong and with milk), but more coffee than tea is now bought in the country's shops As for the tradition of afternoon tea with biscuits, scones, sandwiches or cake, this is a minority activity, largely confined to retired people and the leisured upper-middle class.

1. **Russian national characters: stereotypes**

Russian furry hats, communism, bears, vodka, cold winters, Russian mafia, ushanka, balalaika are some of the most popular stereotypes about Russia and  Russian people. Although most of these are just jokes, some people really believe that Russia is still communist, and that bears walk around the streets. Russia is still a place that continues to mystify people, and has people laughing about Soviet-era stereotypes.

All these stereotypes about Russia are obvious and are known all over the world. I’d like to analyze Russian national characters and their stereotypes in the context of culture and its influence on Russian character, features of Russian education, language, food and drink habits.

**2.1 Russian nationalities**

Russia is actually quite diverse with over 185 different ethnicities. 80.90% of the population is ethnically Russian. The non-Russian ethnicities with the highest populations included Tatars 3.87%, Ukrainians 1.40%, Bashkir 1.15%, Chuvash 1.05%, Chechens 1.04 %, and Armenians 0.86%. In numerical terms, there are about 5 million Tatars; nearly 2 million Ukrainians; and over 1 million Bashkir, Chuvash, Chechens, and Armenians each.

However, there are numerous other ethnicities as well, including Tajik, Azeri, Kyrgyz, Moldovan, Chinese, Kazakh, Belarusian, Georgian, Uzbek, Vietnamese, and Turkmen.

[Illegal immigrants, primarily from Central Asia](http://russia-direct.org/content/how-can-russia-cope-influx-migrants), account for over 4 million people residing within Russia. On a final note, more than 14% of Russia is Muslim, making Islam the country’s second largest religion next to Russian Orthodoxy. In fact, Russia is home to Europe’s largest Muslim population.

## **2.2 Culture and Character**

**Caution and Conservatism**

Russians are more likely to be cautious and conservative defenders of the status quo. Their cruel climate, harsh history, and skeptical outlook on life has caused Russians to value stability, security, social order, and predictability, avoiding risk. The tried and tested is preferred over the new and unknown.

**Pessimism**

Russians expect things to go poorly and have learned to live with misfortune. Despite their pessimism, there is an admirable durability and resiliency about Russians, a proven strength and endurance.

**The Russian Soul**

The Russian soul has been described as: sensitive, revere, imaginative, an inclination to tears (but not publicly), compassionate, submissive mingled with stubbornness, patience that permits survival.

**Male-chauvinistic society**

In Russian women are strong, hard-working, nurturing, long-suffering, and the true heroes of Russia. Ninety percent are in the work force, where they occupy mostly secondary positions. Forty million Soviet men died in the three cataclysmic events of the Soviet era - 1) the collectivization of the agriculture, 2) the political purges, and 3) World War II [known as The Great Patriotic War] - creating a severe shortage of men for two generations of women.

Although Russian culture is very male-chauvinistic, usually the women of the society are the responsible ones. Rather than working through the problems, men often retreat to hanging around together smoking and drinking vodka late into the night, perpetuating the irresponsibility. Women are forced to take hold of the responsibilities, but not given the authority in family or society.

**Russian sense of humor**

Russian humor is an integral part of Russian culture. Westerners sometimes allege that Russians have no sense of humor or admit it to be dry, sarcastic and quite often indecent. It is very subtle based on the many intertextual ties with Russian literature, Russian cinema, politics and so on. Russian humor gains much of its wit from the great flexibility and richness of the Russian language, allowing for plays and unexpected associations.

Stierlitz, Rabinovich, Vovochka, Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson, Fantômas, New Russians, animals, golden fish are the main characters in Russian humor. Forms of Russian humors are Chastushka, toasts, Black humor.

* 1. **Education**

Russia has private and state sectors in education. It is natural for parents to support their children and to pay for their university, but there are also families who cannot afford to pay the price of a university term. That’s a serious problem as it a places a sort of restriction on entering respected universities – although there is still a chance to win a scholarship. But the cleverer a student is, the faster he or she will find a job to get some financial independence as the money given by standard scholarships is not enough by far.

Demographics come into play in education and in gender inequality. There may be more boys or girls at different steps of the educational ladder not through some cultural restrictions but only due to this factor. As for universities, there are departments where one can find practically no female students – in these cases, the reason may be our society’s stereotypes. For instance, it is thought that teaching is for girls (with justifications like: they are to be mothers, it doesn’t require much physical effort, etc.). Therefore, there are only a few male students on the faculty of our foreign languages department.

* 1. **Language**

Russian language belongs to the Indo-European family of languages, Slavic group, East Slavic branch. The closest relatives of the Russian language are the remaining two East Slavic languages: Ukrainian and Belorussian. On the vast territory of Russia you will see almost no dialectal divisions, almost all people speak common literary language, only old people might still use local dialects which vary little from place to place. Language translation problems can happen. In English, one word may suffice to convey an idea, while Russian will have several words to choose from, each with a slightly different shade of meaning. In recent years there have been national discussions on the concern of the English and American borrowings took place in the Russian language. Many people are quite concerned about the compromise of the language.

* 1. **Food and drink**

Russian cuisine is a collection of the different cooking traditions of the Russian people. The cuisine is diverse, with Central European, Middle Eastern and Central Asian influences as Russia is by area the largest country in the world. Its foundations were laid by the peasant food of the rural population in an often harsh climate, with a combination of plentiful fish, pork, poultry, caviar, mushrooms, berries, and honey. Crops of rye, wheat, barley and millet provided the ingredients for a plethora of breads, pancakes, pies, cereals, beer and vodka. Soups and stews are centered on seasonal or storable produce.

[Tea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tea) is the most common drink in almost all parts of Russia. First introduced from [China](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China) in the 17th century, its popularity has since spread throughout the country. [Black tea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_tea) has always been the dominant variety.

Despite the fact that the Russians were mainly “tea-drinkers”, coffee gained more and more favour as time went on. 2/3 of all Russian coffee-drinkers are citizens of Moscow and St. Petersburg. While Western countries practice mostly coffee to-go, Russians have different reasons to come to their favourite coffee shops. As it goes with tea, Russians prefer either to spend time chatting over coffee, or to have a meal or snack along with their caffeine dose.

1. **Similarities of British and Russian national character**

While starting to write this final project I was thinking about how little we have in common with British culture. Despite all the differences I ‘ve found out that we have more similarities than they can seem at the first sight.

As in Britain, Russia has different nationalities with their tokens, ways of life, specific traits of character and national food. In both countries there is a huge number of immigrants that influence on our cultures. Muslim has become the second largest religion in both countries after the official Christianity.

Both nationalities are conservative, cautious, patient, value stability, security, avoid risk.

Sense of humor is different in Britain and Russia but it is a way of life and play a significant role for both countries.

For my surprise, English (not British) don’t place a high value on education. It is still unusual for English parents to arrange extra private tuition for their children, even among those who can easily afford it. In Russia most families support their children for the tuition or pay the price of a university term. But not all the families can afford a huge cost of higher education that is a common problem for both countries. Fortunately, Russian students are guaranteed free tuition in State educational establishments for those who pass a competitive examination.

Both countries have some stereotypes about their cuisine and especially about tea-drinking. It is true that in Britain it is still prepared in a distinctive way (strong and with milk), but more coffee than tea is now bought in the country's shops. Russians are mainly “tea-drinkers”, but coffee gained more and more favour as time went on. Russians prefer to spend time chatting over coffee in contrast to British who like “coffee to-go”.

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